

Urban Elections and Decision-Making
in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1800

Edited by

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with the assistance of

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and Alexander Schlaak

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P U B L I S H I N G

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

PRE-MODERN STATE URBAN
POLICY AT A TURNING POINT
IN THE KINGDOM OF HUNGARY:
THE ELECTIONS TO THE TOWN COUNCIL

ISTVÁN H. NÉMETH

I Introduction

In the 16th and 17th centuries, the kingdom of Hungary was in a rather peculiar political situation which determined the political options of the free royal towns. As a result of the battle of Mohács (1526) and the conquest of Buda (1541), the central territories of the medieval kingdom of Hungary, including its urban settlements, became part of the Ottoman Empire. The eastern part of the country, under the name of the Principality of Transylvania, developed into a semi-independent Ottoman vassal state. What was left of the kingdom of Hungary, including medieval Croatia, Slavonia and a portion of Dalmatia, fell into the hands of the Habsburgs after the death of King Louis II of the Jagiellon dynasty (1526); afterwards, it was primarily the Central European interests of the Habsburg dynasty that determined the Habsburgs' policy in Hungary. The most important result of the Ottoman expansion was that Hungary became a constant war zone.¹ Moreover, Hungary's income could only cover one fifth of the military expenses. Therefore, the Hungarian defense system was partly financed by the Holy Roman Empire.

¹ Ferenc Szakály, "Die Bilanz der Türkenherrschaft in Ungarn", in: *Acta Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 34, 1988, 63-77; Géza Pálffy, "The Impact of the Ottoman Rule on Hungary", in: *Hungarian Studies Review*, 28, 2001, 109-132.

The political characteristics of urban development in Hungary in the 17th century were influenced by two, apparently contradictory, factors.² On the one hand, the court in Vienna had to rely increasingly on local—including urban—sources of income because of the considerable increase in military expenses due to the Long Turkish War (1591-1606) and the European diplomatic commitments of the Habsburgs. On the other hand, since the private armies of the landlords in the frontier territories substituted in part for the military committed in operations elsewhere in Europe, the Hungarian nobility gained increasing political strength. This nobility made use of the expeditions of the princes of Transylvania against the Habsburgs and challenged the court in Vienna more effectively than its Austrian, Bohemian and Moravian peers.³ This situation strengthened the superiority of the nobility over the towns. Nevertheless, the centralising tendencies of the Habsburg administration increased further with regards to the towns; this was related to the consolidation of the early modern state. In this era, urban policy became more and more uniform and also a responsibility of the state administration legitimated by the ruler.⁴

As compared to Western Europe, urban development in the kingdom of Hungary can be considered retarded. The Hungarian network of towns—with only a few significant centers of trade—developed with a fair amount of gaps. The only late medieval town of more than ten thousand inhabitants was the agglomeration of Buda, Pest and Budafelhévíz, which can be considered one economic unit. Some of the settlements practicing urban functions gained rights appropriate to their economic standing.

² István H. Németh, *Várospolitika és gazdaságpolitika a 16-17. századi Magyarországon. A felső-magyarországi városszövetség*, 2 vols., Budapest 2004.

³ Kálmán Benda, "Absolutismus und ständischer Widerstand in Ungarn am Anfang des 17. Jahrhunderts", in: *Südost-Forschungen*, 33, 1974, 85-124; Géza Pálffy, "Der ungarische Adel und der Kaiserhof in der frühen Neuzeit", in: Vacláv Bůžek, Pavel Král (eds.), *Šlechta v habsburské monarchii a císařský dvůr (1526-1740)*, České Budějovice 2002, 133-152.

⁴ Ronald G. Asch, Heinz Duchhardt, "Die Geburt des 'Absolutismus' im 17. Jahrhundert: Epochenwende der europäischen Geschichte oder optische Täuschung?", in: Ronald G. Asch, Heinz Duchhardt (eds.), *Der Absolutismus—ein Mythos? Strukturwandel monarchischer Herrschaft in West- und Mitteleuropa (ca. 1550-1700)*, Köln, Weimar, Wien 1996, 3-24; Ronald G. Asch, "Kriegsfinanzierung, Staatsbildung und ständische Ordnung in Westeuropa im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert", in: *Historische Zeitschrift*, 268, 1999, 635-671; Heinz Duchhardt, "Absolutismus—Abschied von einem Epochenbegriff?", in: *Historische Zeitschrift*, 258, 1994, 113-122; Nicholas Henshall, *The Myth of Absolutismus: Change and Continuity in Early Modern European Monarchy*, London 1992; Christopher R. Friedrichs, *Urban Politics in Early Modern Europe*, London, New York 2000.

These settlements were called free royal towns (*civitas libera regia*, *königliche Freistadt*), while the remaining ones (*oppidum*, *Marktflecken*) were private properties in the Hungarian legal tradition. Among the settlements functioning as towns in the first quarter of the 16th century, only the free royal towns had the right to send delegates to the occasionally convened assembly of the estates (parliament, *diaeta*, *comitia*, *Reichstag*). Given this legal situation, the present study discusses exclusively the settlements that attained the rank of free royal town from the 16th to the 18th centuries, partly because the urban policy measures of the administration affected only these settlements, and partly because these towns provide the appropriate archival material to draw meaningful conclusions.⁵

II Towns and supremacy

The right of free election of officers in the free royal towns in Hungary became widespread from the first half of the 14th century, when the officers appointed by the monarch vanished from urban administration. Rulers had no documented control over the election of officers in the towns from the 15th century to the late 17th century.⁶ Then, urban policy measures that had already been applied in the other Habsburg territories were introduced in Hungary as well. In the Austrian lands, as opposed to the towns in Hungary, the ruler—instead of the urban community—had already appointed the judges from the 15th century onwards. It can be demonstrated in every Austrian land that the ruler's commissioners were present during the election of town officers in order to swear them in (*Eidkommissar*). The function of the commissioners changed at the turn of

⁵ György Granasztói, "L'Urbanisation de l'espace danubien (1500-1800)", in: *Annales E. S. C.*, 44, 1989, 379-399; György Granasztói, "Sur l'industrie urbaine du bâtiment en Hongrie (1400-1650)", in: *Acta Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 29, 1983, 217-232; Jenő Szűcs, "Das Städtewesen in Ungarn im 15-17. Jahrhundert", in: György Székely, Erik Fügedi (eds.), *La Renaissance et la Réformation en Pologne et en Hongrie*, Budapest 1963, 97-164; András Kubinyi, *König und Volk im spätmittelalterlichen Ungarn. Städteentwicklung, Alltagsleben und Regierung im mittelalterlichen Königreich Ungarn*, Herne 1998.

⁶ Erik Fügedi, "Középkori magyar városprivilegiumok", in: *Tanulmányok Budapest Múltjából*, 14, 1961, 17-107, 44, 58-64; Richard Marsina, "Vývoj správy miest v stredoveku", in: Richard Marsina (ed.), *Vývoj správy miest na Slovensku*, Martin 1984, 21-49; Jenő Szűcs, *Városok és kézművesség a XV. századi Magyarországon*, Budapest 1955, 282-287; András Kubinyi, "Der ungarische König und seine Städte im 14. und am Beginn des 15. Jahrhunderts. Stadt und Stadtherr im 14. Jahrhundert", in: Wilhelm Rausch (ed.), *Stadt und Stadtherr im 14. Jahrhundert. Entwicklungen und Funktionen*, Linz 1972, 193-220.

the 16th and 17th centuries and, after a short break, from the first quarter of the 17th century: their new primary role was to influence the election of officers and ensure control of the towns (*Wahlkommissar*).⁷ Beginning in 1672, royal and state control over the towns in Hungary started to emerge. This was not alien to developments in Europe in general and in the Habsburg monarchy in particular. The change in the political situation also implied that the ceremony and the legitimisation of the urban election of officers changed as well.

III The corporations and officers of power

The amount of territory in the kingdom of Hungary under Habsburg control was significant (approximately 120.000 km²). However, the administration and the governing bodies of the free royal towns were not uniform. Among the towns, only Pozsony and Sopron featured the organisation found in the neighboring Austrian territories, where the most prominent urban officers were the mayor and the judge. In the majority of the towns, the most important officer was uniformly the judge, an officer always appointed by the local community. In the towns close to Pozsony [Pressburg, Bratislava SK] and Sopron [Ödenburg] (Modor [Modern, Modra SK], Bazin [Böding, Pezinok SK], Szentgyörgy [Sankt Georgen, Svätý Jur SK], Nagyszombat [Tyrnau, Trnava SK], Szokolca [Skalitz, Skalica SK]), both offices existed, but that of judge was more prominent. The mayor and the captain were in charge of administrative and financial affairs. In the mining towns of Lower Hungary (Selmecbánya [Schemnitz, Banská Štiavnica SK], Besztercebánya [Neusohl, Banská Bystrica SK], Bakabánya [Pukantz, Pukanec SK], Kőrmöcbánya [Kremnitz, Kremnica SK], Újbánya [Königsberg, Nová Baňa SK], Libetbánya [Libethen, Ľubietová SK], Bélabánya [Düllen, Banská Belá SK]) and in the towns of

⁷ Felix Czeike, "Das Wiener Bürgermeisteramt im Hoch- und Spätmittelalter", in: Felix Czeike, Richard Perger, Hans Hülber et al. (eds.), *Wiener Bürgermeister im Spätmittelalter*, Wien 1980, 3-16; Karl Gutkas, "Das Städtewesen der österreichischen Donauländer und der Steiermark im 14. Jahrhundert", in: Wilhelm Rausch (ed.), *Stadt und Stadtherr im 14. Jahrhundert. Entwicklungen und Funktionen*, Linz/Donau 1972, 229-250, 234-237; Wilhelm Neumann, "Landesfürst, Stadtherren und Städte Kärntens im 14. Jahrhundert", in: *ibid.*, 325-345; Otto Brunner, "Städtische Selbstregierung und neuzeitlicher Verwaltungsstaat in Österreich", in: *Österreichische Zeitschrift für öffentliches Recht*, 6, 1955, 221-249; Franz Baltzarek, "Die Stadtordnung Ferdinands I. und die städtische Autonomie im 16. Jahrhundert", in: Franz Baltzarek, Peter Csendes, Grete Mecenseffy et al. (eds.), *Wien an der Schwelle der Neuzeit*, Wien 1974, 31-43.

Upper Hungary (Kassa [Kaschau, Košice SK], Lőcse [Leutschau, Levoča SK], Bártfa [Bartfeld, Bardejov SK], Eperjes [Preschau, Prešov SK], Kisszeben [Zeben, Sabinov SK], Késmárk [Käsmark, Kežmarok SK], Debrecen), the office of the mayor did not even exist; the leader of the town was undoubtedly the judge.

The most important administrative body in the towns was the internal council (senate) of twelve members, with additional members from the external council. There was no uniform practice regarding the external councils either. In some of the towns (Pozsony, Modor, Kassa, Lőcse, Bártfa, Eperjes, Kisszeben, Késmárk, Kismarton [Eisenstadt A], Kőszeg [Güns], Trencsén [Trentschin, Trenčín SK], Bazin, Nagyszombat, Modor, Szakolca), the external council negotiated with the so-called elected community (*electa communitas*). This body practiced the right of election for the entire community of citizens. It usually consisted of fifty to sixty, sometimes even one hundred, members. In other towns (Sopron, Ruszt [Rust A], Selmecbánya), the external council had fewer members, usually twenty-four. These members played a role mostly in the collection of taxes and the control of finances of the towns. During the elections of officers, everyone in possession of civil rights usually had a right to vote. The combination of these two systems functioned in Breznóbánya and Besztercebánya. In addition to the internal council, these towns had an external council of twenty-four members, but, at the same time, a larger elected community; this latter body had the right to vote.⁸

The election in Hungarian towns were connected to a turning point within the year. They designated feasts around the end and the beginning of the calendar year, as well as at the spring solstice, which marked the end of the old and the beginning of the new economic season. Nagyszombat was the only town where the election of officers took place on a movable feast, Easter Monday. In this respect, however, it is actually not an exception since this feast had also once counted as the beginning of the year.⁹ Nonetheless, the date as a symbol of renewal is only one element of the ceremony surrounding the election of officers. One can also interpret the election ritual as a self-representation of the town council. It

⁸ István H. Németh, “Városi tisztújítások a királyi Magyarországon a 16-17. században”, in: *Arrabona*, 45, 2007, 57-96, 62-63.

⁹ Ibid., 58-59; István Balogh, “A magisztrátus tisztújítása Debrecenben (1715?-1762?)”, in: *Hajdú-Bihar Megyei Levéltár Évkönyve*, 16, 1989, 5-20, 13; István H. Németh, “A szabad királyi városok igazgatásának abszolutista vonásaihoz. A felső-magyarországi városok 1681. évi tisztújításai”, in: László Mayer, György Tilcsik (eds.), *Egy emberöltő Kőszeg szabad királyi város levéltárában. Tanulmányok Bariska István 60. születésnapjára*, Szombathely 2003, 229-254.

is not only the municipal characteristics of the town that can be documented in the event but also the power of the elected bodies and office-holders that is manifested in symbols.¹⁰ In the case of the towns, leaders were not elected on the basis of birth but on the basis of selection by the citizens (the ones in possession of civil rights). In this case, one has to emphasise even more strongly the legal act which, through election, transfers power to a citizen who is of equal standing in legal terms.¹¹ The legal practice in Hungarian towns made the role of elections even more important. In contrast to German towns, there were no patricians in the kingdom of Hungary who would bluntly exclude from power other persons in possession of civil rights. It was only in Besztercebánya that a local privileged group, the *Ringbürger*, played a specific role. However, not even their case reveals privatisation of power because they could only propose one candidate during the election.¹²

In Hungary's free royal towns, the election of officers was closely related to the actual worship or mass that served as a ceremonial element to strengthen the legitimacy of the election. This legitimacy was further reinforced by communion during the ritual; thus electors and elected could vote as if after a catharsis.¹³ The contemporary sources (statutes and descriptions) indicate the real significance of this moment. Consideration of the final decision as a result of divine inspiration made the outcome

¹⁰ Dietrich W. Poeck, *Rituale der Ratswahl. Zeichen und Zeremoniell der Ratssetzung in Europa (12.-18. Jahrhundert)*, Köln, Weimar, Wien 2003.

¹¹ Eberhard Isenmann, "Die städtische Gemeinde im oberdeutsch-schweizerischen Raum (1300-1800)", in: Peter Blickle (ed.), *Landgemeinde und Stadtgemeinde in Mitteleuropa. Ein struktureller Vergleich*, München 1991, 191-261; Rudolf Schlögl (ed.), *Interaktion und Herrschaft. Die Politik der frühneuzeitlichen Stadt*, Konstanz 2004; Rudolf Schlögl, "Vergesellschaftung unter Anwesenden. Zur kommunikativen Form des Politischen in der vormodernen Stadt", in: *ibid.*, 9-60, 46-49; Andreas Würzler, "Zwischen Verfahren und Ritual. Entscheidungsfindung und politische Integration in der Stadtrepublik Bern in der Frühen Neuzeit", in: *ibid.*, 63-91; Jörg Rogge, "Kommunikation, Herrschaft und politische Kultur. Zur Praxis der öffentlichen Inszenierung und Darstellung von Rats Herrschaft in Städten des deutschen Reiches um 1500", in: *ibid.*, 381-407.

¹² András Kubinyi, "Budai és pesti polgárok családi összeköttetései a Jagellókorban", in: *Levéltári Közlemények*, 37, 1966, 227-291; András Kubinyi, "A budai német patriciátus társadalmi helyzete családi összeköttetéseinél tükrében a XIII. századtól a XV. század második feléig", in: *Levéltári Közlemények*, 42, 1971, 203-269, 239, 243-246, 258-262. For the practice of Besztercebánya, see Sándor Kolosváry, Lipót Óváry (eds.), *A magyar törvényhatóságok jogszabályainak gyűjteménye. Corpus statutorum Hungariae municipalium*, vol. IV/2, Budapest 1897, 356-359.

¹³ Németh, *Városi tisztújítások*, 59-61.

quasi independent of the electors. In the words of contemporaries: “whatever office God grants me in His majesty and by His grace” and “may God give appropriate persons to direct the town”.¹⁴ In a statute regulating the election of officers in the year 1621, God’s omnipotence was specifically evoked during worship in the presence of all the citizens prior to the election. In Besztercebánya, all the citizens started the election with a common prayer after the morning worship or mass.¹⁵ In the 16th and 17th centuries, it occasionally happened that all the citizens paraded in a procession before the election. They sang church songs during the procession, mainly the *Veni sancte spiritus*, an antiphon asking for help from the Holy Spirit and generally connected to the start of important undertakings.¹⁶

In the towns of Upper Hungary, the moral and social norms were even more explicitly displayed to all those present during the elections; office-holding was even more closely related to God. In these towns, worship took place prior to the election, and the priest devoted an entire sermon to the divine origin of the election, reminding the audience of the established social standards. The outgoing judge resigned from office in the courtyard of the church, not in that of the town hall, and deposited the symbols of his power in the sacristy.¹⁷ In other towns, the function of the cleric was taken over by a notary or an advocate representing the entire community of citizens. The sermons highlighted the divine origins of the election as well as the power of the officers inaugurated by election, not by birth, stressing the supremacy of the leaders and the duties of the subjects. Delivered in front of the participants every year, the sermon also provided an excellent opportunity to get the “encoded message” through to the audience and influence its social and moral norms concerning the order of civil society. All this received moral confirmation through a common prayer following the sermon.¹⁸ The role of moderator remained with the notary and the advocate for the rest of the election as well. It was not by chance, therefore, that the advocate was given high priority as a mediator between the

¹⁴ Balogh, *Magisztrátus*, 14; Kolosváry, Óváry (eds.), *Corpus statutorum*, vol. II/2, Budapest 1890, 226.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. IV/2, Budapest 1897, 325-328, 356-369.

¹⁶ Németh, *Városi tisztújítások*, 60.

¹⁷ Kálmán Demkó, *Lőcse története*, Lőcse 1897, 367-368.

¹⁸ CJM = Kolosváry, Óváry (eds.), *Corpus statutorum*, vol. IV/2, 317-318, 325-328, 356-359. The sermons delivered were only rarely printed, and none of these are known to be extant today.

elected community or the whole community of citizens and the internal council.¹⁹

Some physical objects also served as symbols representative of the divine power attributed to the leaders of the town. One of the most important ritual acts during the resignation of officers was the deposition of the symbols associated with the given office. These were put down on a table in the council hall or transported into another room. The towns in the western part of Hungary used the sword and the staff as official symbols. In most of these towns, the judge, as leader of the town, and the captain, as executive of the secular power, used the sword, while the mayor used the staff. In the case of Sopron, the mayor and the judge also used the staff, but the keys of the town and the treasury were also part of the set of symbols. In the region of Upper Hungary, the keys of the town played the same role. All these symbols refer to the transfer of divine power. The staff, originating from the scepter, stick or club, is a symbolic object referring to military power as well as to jurisdiction in Greek and Roman tradition, while it is also a sign of divine power and truth in Christianity. As a Christian attribute, the sword refers to judgment, while the key symbolises the power of binding and releasing. The importance of the symbols shows clearly that settlements recently given the status of free royal towns quickly supplied the symbols already in use in others (sword, staff).²⁰ The deposition and transfer of these objects represented resignation from as well as investment of power upon election.

The circle of electors in Hungarian towns was basically limited to those people in possession of civil rights.²¹ In addition, this period also features a system in which the highest offices and bodies were elected by a so-called elected community (*electa communitas*). In this latter case, the number of electors was supplemented before election of one or more persons to the position of advocate. These were introduced to the internal council and the assembly of citizens in a festive manner in the proximity of the town hall. The advocate had a mandate for one year in some towns; elsewhere it could be for two years. Similarly, the senior officers in Hungarian free royal towns in the 16th and 17th centuries were generally not elected for lifetime, with the exception of members of the internal council; only a few towns had a judge and a mayor elected for more than a year. In this case, the term of office of the judge, mayor or captain—elected in the previous year—was simply extended through public acclam-

¹⁹ Németh, *Városi tisztújítások*, 61.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 61.

²¹ Kolosváry, Óváry (eds.), *Corpus statutorum*, vol. IV/2, 21 (Körmöcbánya, 1521), 190 (Besztercebánya, 1582).

ation by the assembly of citizens.²² In several towns, designation of the judge and the mayor was not the responsibility of the whole community of citizens but rather of a smaller body, generally the external council but occasionally both the external and the internal councils. During election of judges and mayors, previously elected officials became candidates; in the town of Kismarton, all the members of the internal council (senate) automatically became candidates. On the basis of the election structure developed in Sopron, the community and the internal council participated equally in the nomination; the community could nominate three candidates, while the internal council could nominate one more person on its own right.²³

Even in the late 17th century, the casting of votes in several towns took place in an apparently archaic fashion: through public acclamation by the assembly of citizens. In many cases, however, this seemingly democratic way of election served the interests of the urban elite because it was easy for them to gain power by pleasing the opinion-formers. This method of election, however, often led to fights and rioting by the discontented.²⁴ The town administration thus aimed at conducting elections separately in order to avoid rebellions that could incidentally endanger the officers and the peace of the town. For the same reason, all the electors were obliged to secrecy by oath. Silence during the election was also enforced by the internal council and the electors, who convened in a separate room or building so that individual vote-casting became easier to manage. The votes were kept by the notary, the advocate and the representatives of the external and the internal councils, in order that they could be recounted later, if necessary.²⁵

During elections, many towns gave priority to electing the highest local officials first; the rest of them were not elected until the following day.²⁶ With the exception of Sopron, the entire community, i.e. everyone

²² Németh, *Városi tisztújítások*, 62-63.

²³ *Ibid.*, 64-66; Besztercebánya: Kolosváry, Óváry (eds.), *Corpus statutorum*, vol. IV/2, 356-359.

²⁴ Magyar Országos Levéltár, E 34 (Prot. rest. civ.), 504; Kolosváry, Óváry (eds.), *Corpus statutorum*, vol. IV/2, 325-328, and Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Finanz- und Hofkammerarchiv, Hoffinanz Ungarn, RN 127. April, 1625, fols. 158-160. April 28, 1625.

²⁵ The following towns certainly conducted elections this way: Kismarton, Szentgyörgy, Sopron, Körmöcbánya, Pozsony, Nagyszombat, Selmecbánya, Besztercebánya, Debrecen. Németh, *Városi tisztújítások*, 61-62; Balogh, *Magisztrátus*, 11-15.

²⁶ Magyar Országos Levéltár, E 34 (Prot. rest. civ.), 2, 31, 74, 97, 141, 161, 218, 446; Szyrocki, Gajek (eds.), *Simplicissimus*, 104-105.

in possession of civil rights, elected the external council and the advocate. In Sopron, on the other hand, the composition of the external council of twenty-four members depended on the decision of the highest officers, the mayor, the judge and the town's internal council, from the early 16th century on.²⁷ The mandate for the members of the internal council (senate) was valid for lifetime in almost every case in the 16th and 17th centuries. A member of the council could only be dismissed if he was unable to perform his duties due to senility, if he died or moved away or if he was convicted of a criminal offence. In these cases, both bodies simply supplemented their number with confirmation by public acclamation. The continuous existence of a leading elite, characteristic of the free royal towns in Hungary, is shown by the fact that the composition of the council never changed significantly and that the resignation of councillors took place only in a few cases.²⁸

The members of the internal council were elected from the external council in every town in Hungary. The external council and the electors usually assured that this principle prevailed.²⁹ It was especially important when the councillors' mandate was not valid for lifetime and the election could bring about change every year. In Kassa, for instance, the method of distributing urban offices ensured the conservation of power. Since one member of the town's leading elite also always held the office of advocate, the internal council could strongly control and manipulate the external council, a highly important condition since the finances of the internal council were, in turn, controlled by the external council and the advocate.³⁰ This method of retaining power can be detected throughout the entire period; its efficiency is shown well by the fact that the leading elite in the town was almost never under pressure. By the 18th century, this method had become so established that the internal council elected the advocate, who was considered the second in command in the town.³¹

²⁷ Demkó, *Lőcse*, 369; Balogh, *Magisztrátus*, 14-15; Németh, *Városi tisztújítások*, 66; József Tirmitz, "Sopron szabad király város külső tanácsa 1526-1711", in: György Bónis, Alajos Degré (eds.), *Tanulmányok a magyar helyi önkormányzat múltjából*, Budapest 1971, 51-79, 54, 63-67.

²⁸ Németh, *Városi tisztújítások*, 65-66.

²⁹ Ibid.; Németh, *A szabad királyi városok*; Németh, *Várospolitikai*, vol. 2, 205-209.

³⁰ Andor Csizmadia, *A magyar városi jog: Reformtörekvések a magyar városi közigazgatásban*, Kolozsvár 1941, 70.

³¹ György Granasztói, "A vezetés szociológiája a középkorvégi Kassán", in: Ildikó Horn (ed.), *Perlekedő évszázadok: Tanulmányok Für Lajos történetész 60. születésnapjára*, Budapest 1993, 124-146; Németh, *Várospolitikai*, vol. 2, 205-209; István H. Németh, *Kassa szabad királyi város archontológiája: Bírák, külső*

IV Ceremony and legitimacy

The inaugural ceremony confirmed the legitimacy of those elected. The most important element of the inauguration was the oath, while the symbols of power from God provided the theoretical background. In towns where the rest of the officers were elected a day later, the judge first swore a partial oath to his electors and the advocate, whereby he promised to serve the welfare of the town. Otherwise, the judge's inauguration took place on the day of the elections, and he was sworn in the day after. It was a general custom in all the free royal towns in the western part of the country that most officers, with the exception of the judge (the mayor in Pozsony, the mayor and the judge in Sopron), swore their oath in the town hall. The judge (the mayor in Pozsony and both officers in Sopron), as the leading person in the town, always swore his oath in the church; elsewhere these men swore their oath in the town hall as well as in the church, in the presence of the notary or the parish priest. Contemporary public discourse apparently attributed divine intervention to election through electors, making the significance of an oath in the church obvious: this oath was more binding for the town leader than a simple one in the town hall. For their swearing-in as town leaders, those elected were led before the citizens by their electors. The town hired trumpeters and drummers to play music during the fancy parade that always took the form of a procession.³²

The elected bodies featured numerous peculiarities. After election in Szentgyörgy, the members of the internal council proceeded to the church with bells ringing, attended mass and then swore an oath in the town hall.³³ The judge, however, always swore his oath by the cross or the Gospel in front of the main altar in the church. It was an old custom in Sopron that the senior pastor always called the attention of the new officers to conscientious and honest duty in a sermon prior to the oath of the mayor and the judge in the church of Saint George.³⁴ It was probably the local variation of the so-called *Richterpredigt*, widespread in the towns of Upper Hungary (and also in German-speaking territories). After swearing the oath, they always sang the *Hymnus Ambrosianus*, i.e. the *Te Deum*, the concluding song in the church ritual. Finally, the electors escorted the most important elected officers (the judge, the mayor and the

és *belső tanács* (1500-1700), Budapest 2006; Magyar Országos Levéltár, E 23 (Litt. cam. Scep.) October 5, 1723.

³² Németh, *Városi tisztújítások*, 66-68.

³³ Magyar Országos Levéltár, E 34 (Prot. rest. civ.), 42-54, 577.

³⁴ Kolosváry, Óváry (eds.), *Corpus statutorum*, vol. V/2, 165.

captain) back to their homes in a ceremonial fashion—apparently another established custom in the towns.³⁵

Primarily in the towns of Upper Hungary, the inauguration of the judge could also be modeled on another ceremony, whereby the external council elected the judge, whose inauguration took place on the same day. It was not until one day later that the election of the internal council followed. In a description by Daniel Speer, a German musician and soldier serving in Hungary (*ungarischer Simplicissimus*), the inauguration of the judge in Kassa appears to be similar to a play in which the symbols of legitimacy multiply. The electors escorted the elected judge to the cemetery next to the church where members of the guilds lined up and greeted him with the symbols of their trades and provided him with presents, among them six horses and a wagon full of firewood. The firewood meant that the judge would be burnt if he ever betrayed his town. The music of the trumpeters and drummers made the inauguration even more ceremonial. Two councillors led the judge to a chair symbolising a throne; he sat down, and four councillors lifted the seated judge, as the assembled citizens greeted their new leader. The event was concluded by worship service which started with a procession followed by a short sermon in Hungarian and German about the election of the judge and ended with a dinner held in the town hall.³⁶

In the inauguration ceremony, the symbols reinforcing the divine election of the new judge frequently blended with the moral expectations of the town towards its elected officer. Although it is known that the priest's sermon and the judge's speech were occasionally printed, none of these few printed copies has survived; therefore, it is impossible to analyze the text of the sermons. It is clear from descriptions of the printed material, however, that the judge in Kassa, Joannes Bocatius (Bock), stressed the responsibility associated with this office and referred to its divine origin in his speech.³⁷ The power granted by God is also referred to in the ceremonial parts of the inauguration of the judge in Kassa, especially the use of a

³⁵ Németh, *Városi tisztújítások*, 68.

³⁶ Marian Szyrocki, Konrad Gajek (eds.), *Ungarischer oder Dacianischer Simplicissimus*, Wien 1973; Demkó, *Löcse*, 367-369; Balogh, *Magisztrátus*, 15.

³⁷ Joannes Bocatius, *Regentenspiegel. Eine Oration vom Standt der Obrigkeit*, Bártfa 1604; Johannes Serpilius, *Desz Allerhöchsten Gottes Christliche vnd Pflichtige Erhoehung in einer Richter Predigt, Bey Beschawung Desz Stadt-Schildes oder Wappens der Stadt Keyszmark*, Löcse 1637; Gedeon Borsa, Ferenc Hervay, Béla Holl et al. (eds.), *Res litteraria hungariae vetus operum impressorum*, vol. 2, 1601-1635, Budapest 1983, n. 906; Károly Szabó, *Régi magyar könyvtár*, vol. 2, Budapest 1885, n. 510.

throne since this is the symbolical seat of all spiritual and secular power; it denotes the presence and divine origin of this power. The elevation (*elevatio*) also shows the divine origin of the office, while the rest of the symbols (a wagon full of firewood and the greeting by the guild masters) also refer to the responsibility of the elected as well as to the consequences of inappropriate conduct in office. The latter show the special character of the election of officers in the towns: the transfer of power along with the possibility of being held responsible by the community.

V Symbols of autonomy and state control: The town hall in Sopron

We have to note that Hungarian urban policy witnessed fundamental changes at the end of the 17th and beginning of the 18th century. These changes are attested by the symbolic elements of the only town hall constructed in that period, designed by the mayor of Sopron, Dr. Christoph Lackner, a person of humanist erudition who was well-versed in the use of symbols. Some parts of the ornamentation in the town hall, which was constructed on the principles of a precise symbolic program, encourage loyalty to the ruler. This can be explained as part of the propaganda against the attacks by troops of the prince of Transylvania, Gábor Bethlen (1613-1629). Some of the inscriptions are very similar to early Renaissance representations of the human vices (sloth, envy, greed, perjury, ignorance, pride) in the town hall of Bártfa (end of the 15th century). According to the interpretation of the learned mayor of Sopron, anyone entering the town hall should be free of these vices. The next group of inscriptions and images, however, represent the virtues to be pursued by the citizens and the officers (charity, faith, prudence, temperance, justice, courage). In addition, numerous inscriptions reminded those approaching the elected urban officers to act in favor of the town and to respect the decisions of its leaders. Its most telling expression is the inscription in the great room of the town hall which nearly dominates this seat of the decision-makers: *Qui hostili animo Republicam est animatus, cum natura sit civis, voluntate fit hostis et perduelis dicitur*.³⁸ The quotation is a “bourgeois” version of a citation from Ulpian, adapted in the code of Justinian. With the almost total independence of the town’s autonomy in

³⁸ Who is with hostile soul against the republic, while a citizen by nature, becomes an enemy by will and is called a traitor. Johann Conrad Barth, *Oedenburgisches Rath-Haus, weiland vom Seligen Herrn Christoph Lackner, J. U. Doctore und hochverdienten Burgermeister der Koenigl. Freystadt Oedenburg, mit Sinnreichen Gemalden und Spruochen gezieret*, Pozsony 1670.

mind, Lackner had the reference to the ruler left out of the quotation and only referred to the *res publica* since this expression was used as a technical term denoting the town at this period.

While the town fairly “dominated” in the symbolic design of the town hall in Sopron in the first quarter of the 17th century, its later reconstruction complied with the forthcoming centralising measures in many respects. The Latin verse on the external wall of the building, which was slightly rebuilt at the beginning of the 18th century, had already referred to the supremacy of the king, the homeland and the laws. A major reconstruction of the town hall in 1782 clearly displayed the supremacy of the royal commissioner acting for the king. The representation of the apotheosis of Johann Schilson, the royal commissioner overseeing the finances of the town in that year, occupied the complete ceiling of the meeting room. It was the work of Stefan Dorfmeister, who produced excellent frescoes in Hungary at the time, and it clearly expressed the inferiority of the town officers by means of contemporary artistic devices.³⁹ What were the causes and characteristics of the change which led to such a radical transformation in the symbolic design of the town hall in Sopron in less than a century?

VI The causes and effects of state intervention

It was exactly in this domain that early absolutist urban policy became apparent for the first time, i.e. in control of the election of officers. The antecedents of these intentions date back to the beginning of the 17th century, but, in fact, their consolidation took place in the middle of the century. At that time, the court in Vienna intended to introduce the concept of *Kammergut*, well-known in the kingdom of Hungary and the Austrian territories. In the 16th and the 17th centuries, the towns were theoretically subject to the Hungarian Holy Crown, i.e. an abstract object representing the state. According to the new intentions, the towns would no longer be subject to the Holy Crown but directly to its embodiment, the ruler (as a landlord). This could lead to the end of the earlier independence of the free

³⁹ Ernő Tompos, “A régi soproni városháza újkori története és az új városháza (tanácsháza) építéstörténete”, in: *Soproni Szemle*, 31, 1977, 212-233, and 298-320, 212-220; Géza Galavics, “Kunst, Bürgertum und aufgeklärter Absolutismus in Ungarn”, in: György Rózsa (ed.), *Evolution générale et développements régionaux en histoire de l’art. Actes du XXIIe Congrès International d’histoire de l’art Budapest 1969*, Budapest 1972, part II, 221-225, 381-383.

royal towns, and make it possible for the ruler to act freely over the towns without consulting the urban communities or the Hungarian estates.⁴⁰

New administrative methods that anticipated the modern and centralised government of the 18th century were introduced from the late 17th century onwards. Beginning in 1672, the court in Vienna defined the function of delegated election commissioners (*Wahlkommissars*) as to strengthen the capacity of the towns to pay taxes, similar to the Austrian towns. Due to increasing military burdens from the Ottomans during the wars of liberation, internal political conditions and the unfavourable economic situation, the capacity of the towns to pay taxes gradually decreased as their debts increased.⁴¹ At the same time, state control over the urban economy could be connected to the principle of one state and one religion, the re-Catholicisation of towns with an overwhelmingly Protestant population and leadership.⁴² Therefore, the instructions to the commissioners delegated to elections of officers served to consolidate the

⁴⁰ On the connection between the idea of the Hungarian Holy Crown and the states, see Németh, *Várospolitika*, vol. 1, 496-519. On the connection between the concept of *Kammergut* and the Austrian towns: Martin Scheutz, "Compromise and shake hands: The town council, authority and urban stability in eighteenth-century Austrian small towns", in: *Urban History*, 34, 2006, 51-63; Martin Scheutz, "Kammergut und/oder eigener Stand? Landesfürstliche Städte/Märkte und der 'Zugriff' der Gegenreformation", in: Rudolf Leeb, Susanne C. Pils, Thomas Winkelbauer (eds.), *Staatsmacht und Seelenheil. Gegenreformation und Geheimprotestantismus in der Habsburgermonarchie*, Wien 2006, 309-337.

⁴¹ Németh, *Várospolitika*, vol. 1, 244-280. On the decreasing capacity to pay taxes, see the major conclusions of the study on the tax registers of Nagyszombat: István H. Németh, "Die finanziellen Auswirkungen der osmanischen Expansion auf die Städteentwicklung in Ungarn: Die Steuerlasten der ungarischen königlichen Freistädte im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert", in: Simonetta Cavaciocchi (ed.), *La fiscalità nell'economia europea secc. XIII-XVIII. Fiscal Systems in the European Economy from the 13th to the 18th Century*, Firenze 2008, 771-780.

⁴² Németh, *Várospolitika*, vol. 1, 519-528; Németh, *A szabad királyi városok*; Attila Tóth, "Ellenreformáció, abszolutizmus és a városok községi tisztújítások 1672 és 1681 között", in: László Mayer, György Tilcsik (eds.), *Egy emberöltő Kőszeg szabad királyi város levéltárában. Tanulmányok Bariska István 60. születésnapjára*, Szombathely 2003, 215-228. On the absolutist principle of one state and one religion: Ernst Hinrichs, "Abschied vom Absolutismus? Eine Antwort auf Nicholas Henshall", in: Asch, Duchhardt (eds.), *Absolutismus*, 353-371; Asch, Duchhardt, *Die Geburt des "Absolutismus"*; Rudolf Vierhaus, "Wesen und Stil absolutistischer Herrschaft", in: *Niedersächsisches Jahrbuch für Landesgeschichte*, 60, 1988, 1-13; Rudolf Vierhaus, *Staaten und Stände. Vom Westfälischen bis zum Hubertusburger Frieden 1648 bis 1763*, Frankfurt/M. 1990, 15-38; Duchhardt, *Absolutismus*.

urban economy and restore the capacity to pay taxes, as well as to promote the Catholicisation of the leading elite in the towns. Consequently, from this time on, the elite was not only the product of local politics but also a complex reflection of the influence of the appearance of commissioners in the towns. From the beginning, the measures introduced resulted in changes aimed at developing a more modern and more professional administration in the towns. Catholics appointed to lead the towns had to be properly qualified; their denomination in itself was not sufficient.⁴³ It took several decades to reach these goals. Most of the measures enforced by the central administration did not take shape until the early 18th century. By then, at least half of the formerly Protestant leading elite had converted to Catholicism. In addition to the principles of election based on honor and wealth, the attributes “Catholic” and “qualified” (*qualificatus*) had also appeared during the election of urban leaders by the end of the 17th and beginning of the 18th century. The majority of the leading elite had attended a university and possessed qualifications in law and administration.⁴⁴

⁴³ Németh, *Városi tisztújítások*, 68-70. This instruction ensued in the Austrian towns: Astrid Troll, *Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der landesfürstlichen Stadt Bruck an der Leitha (von 1618 bis zum Beginn des 18. Jahrhunderts)*, PhD dissertation, Universität Wien, 1965, 62-68.

⁴⁴ István H. Németh, “Az állam szolgái vagy a város képviselői? A központosuló várospolitikai hatásai a soproni politikai elit átrendeződésében”, in: *Soproni Szemle*, 61, 2007, 125-141. On European tendencies, see Erwin Skoda, *Die Wiener Ratsbürger zwischen 1671 und 1705*, PhD dissertation, Universität Wien, 1974, 110-111; Otto Brunner, *Souveränitätsproblem und Sozialstruktur in den deutschen Reichsstädten der früheren Neuzeit*, in: *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 50, 1963, 329-360, 347-355; Emil Ferdinand Fehling, *Lübeckische Ratslinie von den Anfängen der Stadt bis auf die Gegenwart*, Lübeck 1978; Gerhard Dilcher, “‘Hell, verständig, für die Gegenwart sorgend, die Zukunft bedenkend’. Zur Stellung und Rolle der mittelalterlichen deutschen Stadtrechte in einer europäischen Rechtsgeschichte”, in: *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte, Germanistische Abteilung*, 106, 1989, 12-45, 39-43; Karl Czok, “Zu den städtischen Volksbewegungen in deutschen Territorialstaaten vom 16. bis zum 18. Jahrhundert”, in: Wilhelm Rausch (ed.), *Die Städte Mitteleuropas im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert*, Linz/Donau 1981, 21-42, 31-33; Giorgio Chittolini, “Lo stato e i dottori. XV-XVIII secolo”, in: *Ricerche storiche*, 19, 1989, 483-610; Gerd Kleinheyer, Jan Schröder, *Deutsche Juristen aus fünf Jahrhunderten. Eine biographische Einführung in die Geschichte der Rechtswissenschaft*, Heidelberg 1989; Sigrid Jahns, “Juristenkarrieren in der Frühen Neuzeit”, in: *Blätter für deutsche Landesgeschichte*, 131, 1995, 113-134; Rainer A. Müller, “Zur Akademisierung des Hofrates. Beamtenkarrieren im Herzogtum Bayern 1450-1650”, in: Rainer Christoph Schwinges (ed.), *Gelehrte im Reich. Zur Sozial- und Wirkungs-*

In the beginning, the new measures in urban policy were not uniform since they were influenced by temporary deals. However, the activity of the commissioners of the Hungarian Treasury (*Camera Hungarica*) did not lack identical elements, including ambitions for centralisation, envisaged in the spirit of state control. Some of the measures introduced served to provide better control over elections, while others, introduced in order to change the ceremony, restored professionalism. One can see certain centralising ambitions in the measures introduced. The prevalent election practice valid in numerous towns in the kingdom of Hungary paid attention to the ethnic composition of the given town, with the officers elected on the basis of parity in respect to their “nationality”. The commissioners terminated this practice in most towns because this way they would have had to help a lot more reliable Catholics into power, which proved to be very difficult—especially at the beginning—due to a lack of properly qualified Catholics. The only exception was in Besztercebánya, where the commissioner of the Hungarian Treasury maintained this practice, which was not very popular in the rest of the towns, insisting on the delegation of an appropriate number of Hungarians and Slovaks in addition to the Germans. The reason for this was clearly that the commissioner wanted, with the help of this method, to have an appropriate number of Catholics elected as town leaders. The overwhelming majority of the German Protestants formed the leading elite in the town of Besztercebánya at this time, while most of the Hungarians (basically in the service of the Hungarian Treasury or the county) and Slovaks (miners and craftsmen) were Catholics.⁴⁵

The commissioners wanted a change from movable Easter as the date for election in the town of Nagyszombat, that would also have enabled term to keep the date in mind and therefore would have provided easier control over the election. The commissioners’ wish, however, did not become reality, and Nagyszombat continued to organise the election of its officers on Easter Monday every year. Nonetheless, another more important change from the point of view of the elections was successfully introduced in every town: instead of the community in possession of civil rights electing the officers, the large external council (elected community, *electa communitas*) elected them after its own election. The citizens of the town appointed the members of the elected community, who were only

geschichte akademischer Eliten des 14. bis 16. Jahrhunderts, Berlin 1996, 291-308; Wolf-Ulrich Rapp, *Stadtverfassung und Territorialverfassung: Koblenz und Trier unter Kurfürst Clemens Wenzeslaus (1768-1794)*, Frankfurt/M., Berlin, Bern et al. 1995, 48-51.

⁴⁵ Németh, *Városi tisztújítások*, 71-72.

replaced in case of vacancy, in accordance with the practice in the rest of the towns with a similar electoral structure. Although the citizens voted for a new member, the senate's approval was also needed for full membership. This regulation of the election gave the commissioners of the Hungarian Treasury obvious advantages. If they managed to have the appropriate members elected into the external council, then it was sufficient to convince this elected community, without having to negotiate with the entire community in possession of civil rights (which was still basically Protestant in this period). The citizens of the town constantly submitted petitions against the changes, but, understandably, their attempts never produced results.⁴⁶

VII The place of state intervention: New ceremonial elements in elections

The next phase of measures was directed at changing the ceremony itself. The commissioners cited mainly rebellion of the masses as the cause for change. This was not done without reason, because numerous similar events took place due to gradually increasing discontent at the end of the 17th and beginning of the 18th century, a discontent caused by the intervention of the commissioners, evolving denominational tensions, and the increase in the tax burden on citizens. Elements of professionalism can be seen in those measures that were forged to avoid unrest and occasional rioting. The election ritual in Kőszeg and Szokolca featured the transfer of the key to the town's cellar. As a result of frequent fights and drinking leading to riots during elections, the commissioner reduced the opening hours of the taverns and brasseries in both towns. In Kassa, the recently elected judge prohibited free distribution of wine after the election. The vast majority of the commissioners of the Hungarian Treasury regulated the practice of casting votes for similar reasons. The commissioners often unanimously rejected election through public acclamation. The following method had already been in use to prevent rebellion in towns: the electors were separated from the public and communicated with the internal council and the community of citizens through a mediator, generally one or more advocates. This method had some drawbacks for the commissioners since they could not have a word in the nomination and only occasionally in the procedure of the elections; nevertheless, they managed

⁴⁶ Štátny archív v Bratislave, pobočka Trnava, Magistrat mesta Trnava, Magistrátne protokoly II/9, fols. 136-137. March 27, 1690; Magyar Országos Levéltár, E 34 (Prot. rest. civ.), 60, 105, 329, 562.

to intervene in other ways. To prevent rebellion, the commissioners intended to set the election date as late as possible so that initiators of tumults could not gather in an appropriate number. An election on short notice also prevented disturbances in the crowd.⁴⁷

Regarding the elections, the transformation of urban administration into a real administrative office of the state can be observed.⁴⁸ This transformation was promoted by regulations that prescribed, among other things, mandatory attendance during elections. In several towns, the date of regional fairs within a range of the towns happened to coincide with the date of the election, an that caused a postponement of even several hours in the timing of the election. This not only annoyed the commissioner but also provoked the electors, who had been convoked in vain, which made them more inclined to rebelliousness. The commissioners of the Hungarian Treasury solved this problem by making the presence of the electors mandatory; those absent had to pay a penalty. This method became uniform in all the free royal towns at the end of the 17th and beginning of the 18th century.⁴⁹ The commissioners changed old-fashioned and unique town customs, for instance in Bazin, where the captain had a staff as a symbol of his office. The commissioner considered this too “rustic”, because it originated from the time when the town belonged to a landlord and consisted of serfs. He, therefore, ordered the use of a sword as the symbol of the office of captain, as in the rest of the towns.⁵⁰

European tendencies also appeared in the fact that the state started to treat the personnel in urban administration as its own officers. Instead of holding honorable offices in addition to their original occupations, the leaders performed their increasingly administrative duties as officers of the state. As a first step, the commissioners had to represent the supremacy of the ruler since election was not exclusively the concern of God and those in possession of civil rights. Therefore, fundamental changes were introduced in several ritualised election elements in order to represent independent urban authority free from secular intervention and subject only to divine supremacy. Acting on behalf of the ruler, the commissioner of the Hungarian Treasury became the most important person in the election process. The arrival of the delegated commissioner and his invitation to

⁴⁷ Németh, *Városi tisztújítások*, 72-73; Kolosváry, Óváry (eds.), *Corpus statutorum*, IV/2, 662.

⁴⁸ Nicolas Rügge, *Im Dienst von Stadt und Staat: Der Rat der Stadt Herford und die preußische Zentralverwaltung im 18. Jahrhundert*, Göttingen 2000; Németh, *Az állam szolgálói*.

⁴⁹ Németh, *Városi tisztújítások*, 73.

⁵⁰ Magyar Országos Levéltár, E 34 (Prot. rest. civ.), 540.

the election were integrated into these ceremonies in the late 17th century. From then on, after the town leaders had learnt of the commissioner's arrival, the judge, the mayor, the advocate and the representatives of the internal and external councils immediately contacted him through envoys who greeted him appropriately on the occasion of the election and the related festivity. On the day of the election, the assembly of the citizens, the electors and the leaders of the town again sent envoys to him to invite him to the election in the name of the town. The commissioner was escorted there with due respect, sometimes taking a coach to the town hall, followed by the town notabilities on foot. The commissioner took the most prominent seat in the meeting room of the town hall; if a procession preceded the election, the march had to pass by his lodging.⁵¹

Earlier, it had been the resigning officers that had returned the objects symbolising governance of the town (staff, key, sword) to the citizens; now, it was the representative of the ruler (the king of Hungary) that received these symbols and, in turn, handed them over to the newly elected officers. Furthermore, the commissioner of the Hungarian Treasury approved the elected officers and bodies of the towns in the name of the king. In other towns, the votes were counted in front of the commissioner instead of the elected community with the notary and the advocates in attendance; the elected communities were then sworn in by the commissioner. Throughout the ceremony, therefore, the mandate and the legitimacy of the town's leading elite were exclusively in the hands of the ruler as a landlord, instead of the community acting through divine inspiration. Additionally, in the spirit of his mandate, the commissioner strived to restore the earlier standing of the Roman Catholic religion in towns that were still overwhelmingly Protestant at that time. The Protestant town leaders also had to attend elections when judges were sworn into office in the presence of the commissioner; this took place in the church, with the assistance of Catholic priests and accompanied by the singing of hymns.⁵² The procession, with the mandatory presence of all the participants, became an integral part of the election. The town hall gave way to the parish church as the standard location for the swearing-in ceremony of the judges. Since most commissioners controlled elections in more than one town, the date and duration of the elections were also defined. When more than one town in the same region wanted to hold elections at the same

⁵¹ Németh, *Városi tisztújítások*, 73-74.

⁵² Archív Hlavného Mesta Bratislavy, Úradné knihy 2 a 12, fols. 91-92. April 24, 1673.

time, the dates were coordinated to avoid overlapping. Elsewhere, the lengthy procedure was shortened.⁵³

VIII Professionalism in urban administration

Urban administration also featured steps towards professionalism and standardisation. Due to the towns' debts, a primary objective was to review the accounting; therefore, controllers responsible for the finances were appointed along with the commissioners.⁵⁴ In order to standardise urban administration, the office of the mayor became a general feature from the early 18th century on, even in the towns where such an office had not previously existed.⁵⁵ A new administrative characteristic was that the commissioners could admonish with blackballs those elected urban officers who had shown a weak performance, thus cautioning them to take better care of the town and remedy the objections against them. The basic administrative practice of towns also changed during this period. The standardisation enforced by the commissioners and the methods of running undisturbed elections often provided the government with identical solutions, of which the easiest appeared to be the extension of the appointment of (as many as possible) Catholic urban officers with appropriate qualifications and administrative experience. Although not unknown, this cannot be considered an established practice until the beginning of the 18th century in the kingdom of Hungary, when the tendency became general and the term of office was extended to a period of two years and later to four years. This development also promoted the professionalism of participants in urban administration since it was hardly possible to perform the major task of properly governing a town with an increasing population while continuing to practice one's original occupation at the same time.⁵⁶

⁵³ Németh, *Városi tisztújítások*, 74.

⁵⁴ Németh, *A szabad királyi városok*.

⁵⁵ Albert Gárdonyi, "A polgármesteri tisztség eredete és fejlődése hazánkban", in: *Városi Szemle*, 25, 1939, 359-370; Magyar Országos Levéltár, E 23 (Litt. cam. Scep.) November 4, 1716, October 13, 1717.

⁵⁶ Németh, *Városi tisztújítások*, 74-75; István Nagy, "Buda város gazdálkodása és adósságai a XVII. század első felében", in: *Tanulmányok Budapest múltjából*, 12, 1957, 51-131; István Kállay, "A bécsi Commissio mixta in civitatensibus", in: *Levéltári Közlemények*, 67, 1996, 61-67; István Kállay, "Szabad királyi városaink gazdálkodása 1740-1780 között. (A bécsi udvari kamarai levéltár iratai alapján)", in: *Századok*, 100, 1966, 27-61, 287-328.

One of the most important steps in state intervention in the towns was undoubtedly state control over urban administration and internal affairs. The collection of more and more information about the internal affairs of the towns was important for the state and its officers. The town's notary, who was the most familiar with the internal affairs, therefore, had to be a representative of state power. As this plan became reality, the state resolved to function as an independent authority above the local government, one to which the citizens could turn directly, even against their own urban leaders. In the 17th century, citizens in the kingdom of Hungary could submit requests and petitions directly to the commissioners, as part of a trend gradually on the rise all over Europe.⁵⁷ Most petitions reported abuses by officers who had generally been appointed without election to manage the town's estate. Although these complaints had appeared earlier among petitions submitted by the external council annually, this time the petitions reached an authority which immediately started an inquiry against the incriminated leaders. If the complaints were submitted prior to an election, the state could influence the outcome of an election decisively. This activity performed by the commissioners produced obvious results. From the first decades of the 18th century on, the monarch, through the Hungarian Treasury, gradually started to review the administration of various towns, in order to control and occasionally to convict their leaders.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Németh, *Városi tisztújítások*, 75; Renate Blickle, "Die Supplikantin und der Landesherr. Die ungleichen Bilder der Christina Vend und des Kurfürsten Maximilian I. von rechten 'Sitz um Leben' (1629)", in: Eva Labouvie (ed.), *Ungleiche Paare. Zur Kulturgeschichte menschlicher Beziehungen*, München 1997, 81-99; Lex Heerma van Voss, *Petitions in Social History*, Cambridge 2001; Cecilia Nubola, Andreas Würzler (eds.), *Suppliche e "gravamina". Politica, amministrazione, giustizia in Europa (secoli XIV-XVIII)*, Bologna 2002 [German ed.: Cecilia Nubola, Andreas Würzler (eds.), *Bittschriften und Gravamina. Politik, Verwaltung und Justiz in Europa (14.-18. Jahrhundert)*, Berlin 2005]; Cecilia Nubola, Andreas Würzler (eds.), *Forme della comunicazione politica in Europa nei secoli XV-XVIII. Suppliche, gravamina, lettere—Formen der politischen Kommunikation in Europa vom 15. bis 18. Jahrhundert. Bitten, Beschwerden, Briefe*, Bologna, Berlin 2004; Cecilia Nubola, Andreas Würzler (eds.), *Operare la resistenza. Suppliche, gravamina e rivolte in Europa (secoli XV-XIX)—Praxis des Widerstandes. Suppliken, Gravamina und Revolten in Europa (15.-19. Jahrhundert)*, Bologna, Berlin 2006.

⁵⁸ Nagy, *Buda város*; Győr-Moson-Sopron Megyei Levéltár, Soproni levéltár, Sopron város, Lad. LXIII, fasc. 1-4.

Conclusion

Urban policy in the kingdom of Hungary changed radically from the late 17th century onwards. The free royal towns, previously almost totally independent from state intervention, became subject to close control. As a result of measures that had been introduced in the Austrian territories earlier, the financing and the composition of the leading elite in these towns no longer depended exclusively on internal political circumstances; the activities of the commissioners delegated to elections had a significant impact on all these developments. The major purpose of the representatives of the state's financial administration was the Catholicisation of the mainly Protestant urban elite as well as the professionalisation of the administration and the transparency of the towns' finances. The centralising efforts also changed the symbolic elements of legitimacy of town leadership. The commissioners intended to change or abolish any customs that did not fit into the concept of uniform urban administration. They introduced a new ritual during town elections that—as opposed to urban elections in the 16th and 17th centuries—stressed the supremacy of the ruler instead of the divine origin of the election of urban leadership.

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